

California Department of Education  
Special Education Division  
Assessment, Evaluation, and Support Unit  
P.O. Box 944272  
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720

# *A Parent's Guide to Achievement Testing*



California Department of Education

*The California Department of Education is committed to accountability for the achievement of all students. This guide answers questions about tests that students take in school to measure achievement. These are not tests to determine eligibility for special services, but tests that all students take.*

### ◆ **What is achievement testing?**

Achievement testing is a form of assessment; and assessment involves collecting information about student knowledge, skills, or abilities. Teachers collect information about students to make decisions about how and what to teach. An informal assessment may consist of watching a child solve a problem or play with others. Conducting an achievement test is a formal assessment.

### ◆ **What are typical kinds of tests?**

Schools give various types of tests. Achievement tests measure what a child has learned. Performance tests may require students to carry out a task; for example, a science experiment or class project. Aptitude tests examine a student's potential for future academic work.

### ◆ **Why are tests given?**

There are several reasons for testing your child. One reason is to show how much a student has learned. Another is to reveal how successfully a school has educated students.

Tests tell the teacher about student progress. The results help teachers improve instruction by customizing it to fit the child's needs. School results allow the public to compare schools or school districts.

### ◆ **Hasn't my son or daughter been tested enough already?**

Much information was collected to see whether your child was eligible for special education services. Ongoing testing is needed to continue meeting your child's needs.

### ◆ **How can more testing help my son or daughter?**

Teachers use tests to plan instruction for your child. Without test results, teachers have less information to make decisions.

### ◆ **Doesn't testing take time away from instruction?**

It takes time to assess student learning and to make decisions. Time spent on testing can improve instruction. Tests help teachers judge whether their standards are high enough and whether students are learning what they need to succeed.

When tests show a weakness, teachers can provide the needed instruction. Teachers can build on strengths identified by tests. Time spent on assessment is time well spent.

### ◆ **What is statewide testing?**

The state can require testing. For example, California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program requires that all students in grades 2 through 11 take the Stanford Achieve-

ment Test, Ninth Edition, each year in the spring. This test has various uses, including:

- Comparing a child's or school's score to some group (for example, a nationally representative group)
- Showing how well the child has mastered the skills expected of all students
- Showing how well the school has taught the skills expected of all students
- Showing how well the child has attained proficiency

◆ **Why should my child take part in the statewide test?**

If your child does not take the test, teachers will not receive the scores for your child. Without test results, teachers are less able to make good decisions about the instruction that your child needs.

◆ **But won't my child be at a disadvantage?**

Students with disabilities can be appropriately included in statewide tests. Many students with disabilities can take tests under the same conditions as those of their nondisabled classmates. Some students with disabilities should take tests with accommodations (see examples noted below). A small number of students with significant disabilities will not be able to take the same tests as other students do, even with accommodations. An alternate test is needed to include these students in the school accountability system.

Accommodations used in the classroom should be used during testing, if appropriate. The goal is to level the playing field. Accommodations should help students with disabilities show what

they can do. Students with disabilities may take the STAR test with appropriate accommodations, as described in a student's individualized education program (IEP).

◆ **What accommodations are allowed in testing?**

Certain types of accommodations are sometimes provided to students with special needs. These accommodations are as follows:

- *Braille test.* A visually impaired student may complete a Braille version of the test.
- *Flexible scheduling.* The test may be administered with changes in the standard schedule for testing. These changes include extending the testing time or extending the testing over more sessions.



- *Flexible setting.* Tests may be administered in small groups, in a separate location, or with the use of special lighting.
- *Large-print test.* The test may be printed in a larger print size than the standard.
- *Out-of-level testing.* The child may take a test appropriate for a different grade level than the one in which he or she is enrolled.
- *Revised test format.* The test booklet may be changed by increasing the space between questions or by reducing the number of questions on a page.
- *Revised test directions.* The directions for administering the test may be changed by emphasizing key words or simplifying the language.
- *Aids and/or aides.* The student may have help or special equipment to enhance vision or hearing; masks to cover a portion of the test; markers to maintain a place; assistance to repeat questions, to read, or to sign passages; cues to maintain on-task behavior; equipment to record responses; or communication boards to enhance the student's ability to answer questions.

◆ **Are all accommodations that are used during instruction allowed for testing?**

Accommodations used in testing should not give students with special needs an unfair advantage. For example, it may not be appropriate to read a reading test to a student. Decisions about accommodations depend on the type of test.

An accommodation should be considered if it:

- Is based on the child's need;
- Is already provided in the child's instruction;
- Does not give an unfair advantage; and
- Does not change the nature of what is being tested.

◆ **Who decides whether accommodations are used and, if so, which one(s)?**

Persons familiar with the test and with the student should make decisions about accommodations. The individualized education program (IEP) team made up of parents, the classroom teacher, the program or school administrator, and specialists is in the best position to make these decisions.

◆ **How do I learn more about test accommodations?**

For more information, contact your child's teacher, counselor, or principal. California guidelines for participation of students with disabilities in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program are on the web:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/assess.htm>

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